

THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

A Weekly Journal

CONDUCTED BY

CHARLES DICKENS

No. 951. NEW SERIES.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 1887.

PRICE TWOPENCE.

GRETCHEN.

By the Author of "Dame Durden," "My Lord Conceit,"
"Dorby and Joan," "Corinna," etc.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER VIII. "IT IS TOO LATE!"

In the little parlour, in solemn conclave, sat Sister Maria, the old priest Father Joseph, and Gretchen's two relatives. Above, locked in her own little chamber, the girl lay white and stunned, and full of terrible dread.

Her thoughts could scarce keep pace with the rapid march of events, so much had happened since that morning, when her childish feet had hastened to meet her lover. So much—ah! indeed, so much. The whole current of her life was changed, and this stunned, pale, terrified girl was in no way like the fair childish maiden who had left that room with blithesome heart and step but a few brief hours before.

Even surly Lisschen looked compassionately at her as she unlocked the door, and brought in a tray containing only the bread and water prescribed as penance by Sister Maria.

"They say you are to go to the Convent to-morrow," whispered the old woman. "What is to be done?"

"Oh, Lisschen!" the words fell in terror from the girl's pale lips. It seemed as if a ruthless hand had closed the gates of Paradise upon her, after one brief glimpse of its beautiful promises.

"I dare not stop, or they will suspect me," said the old woman hurriedly. "Thou must set thy wits to work. Tut—tut—all women are sharp enough when they love. Do not look so frightened. I will see the man, and tell him. There is still to-night."

"You will come again. You will tell me," implored the girl.

"Yes, yes; be sure of that. Hush, someone is coming."

Some one! A grave, sombre figure, with a face whose stony calm seemed to-day to bear a look of repressed anguish more terrible than any outcry of physical suffering. What was it that made Gretchen shiver and turn white with sickening fear as that stony face, those burning eyes, looked at her now?

Was it memory, or dread, or that awakening to the tragedies beneath life's surface, that some faces teach us? She could not tell. She could not even have put her feelings into any words, or have expressed that wild and passionate longing which surged through her heart, and prompted her to throw herself down at those feet, crying only, "save me, pity me, pardon me, for sake of your own youth—your own sufferings!"

Had she done so, the whole current of her life might have been changed. Had she done so, Nature might for once have broken through that icy calm, and in one moment of common weakness those two hearts might have met on one common ground of sympathy and comprehension. Had she done so—ah! who is to know the supreme moment when Fate stands beside us for the good or ill of all our future?

That moment came to Gretchen then. Unknowingly, she passed it by. The old dread and shrinking usurped the place of that strange impulse. It would come to her never, never again, save in the memory of some wild regret—save in that refrain to the broken music of life's song, "could I have known—could I have known!"

The cold, measured tones of the voice she knew broke in upon those thronging

thoughts, harsher than its wont because of the new pain that throbbed in an old and unhealed wound—but what should the child know of that?

"It were better you were dead than that I should have to speak of you as it is my duty to speak—better you were dead than that I should have to tell you the history of your mother. Yet as a warning to yourself, as a voice that from some buried past of infamy and shame speaks out its misery and regret, so would I speak her story in your ears—for like the hand of doom her fate points the way to yours, since neither ignorance, nor warning, nor watchfulness, nor prayers, can keep you in the innocence of childhood any more."

She paused as if for strength. Her hands were clasped against her heart, as if to still some inward pain that held there its seat of suffering.

Gretchen looked at her wide-eyed and trembling, with a terror the like of which she had never known.

The low, cold voice steadied itself; the eyes, pain-filled and tragic with such woe as the girl's young heart could not even dimly conceive, looked back at her once more.

"Your mother was young and fair, and innocent as yourself, when Fate threw across her path the man who was her life's curse. The time will come when you will know the meaning of my words, and remember that the warning your mother would not hear is uttered in your ears for your safety. Orphaned and disgraced your life has been and will be, not for fault of yours, but for that mother whom not even your love could console. There is that upon your life which sets you apart from all the honour and glory of womanhood. It is your penance for her, as it was hers for you. There is a gulf between you and the women whom you see around you. The shadows and sorrows that are your birth-right can best be hidden under the secrecy and silence, the penitence and prayers, that are the daily religion of all wounded hearts and sorrowful lives. You know the life for which you were destined—you have been guilty of wanton sin—of deceit, disobedience, perjury. You can no longer be trusted to the freedom of home. Sterner and safer guardians will be yours from henceforth. That you should so have erred is a cause of deep sorrow to us all; but that you should have erred for the sake of a heretic, and one of that accursed nation whom you have been taught to

abhor, is a crime unpardonable in your grandfather's eyes and in—mine."

Her voice faltered over that last word, as if strength failed her in its utterance; but the girl's broken cry rang out in piteous entreaty, and nerved her once again for the task that lay before her.

"It is my father's nation," she cried; "and, though he is nothing to me but a shadow, I cannot hate his race, and it is from one of that race that I have first received love, or pity, or kindness. I cannot forget that."

"Your father!" fell short and sharp, and with the bitterest contempt that ever rang in spoken words from those proud lips. "Your father!—he is your disgrace. Do not speak of him. Your father! It were better you were in your coffin now than living to claim kinship with a traitor and a coward. But you do not know"—her voice sank into a wail—"no, thank Heaven, you do not know. It is only your mother, your poor, betrayed, unhappy mother . . . and she is dead; and you live; and the shadow of her fate is close upon your own. Ah, child! be warned; be warned in time. There is no help or hope for a woman who listens to a man's vows of love and—believes. They are our foes; our tyrants; our curse. It is from your mother's fate that I would have saved you; that I tried to save you. Child, child, in Heaven's name don't tell me it is too late!"

The anguish and entreaty of her voice startled Gretchen into a new wonder. Never had the cold, proud, passive woman spoken to her with such a voice, looked at her with such a face!

She rose slowly to her feet. Her eyes sank; the quick breath heaved her breast.

"Yes," she said very low, and trembling greatly, "it is—too late!"

A moment's silence, filled only by the beat of throbbing hearts. Then there was a gasp, a cry that, like the very soul and essence of undying pain, broke forth in one long moan.

Ere Gretchen's call of terror echoed it, the proud figure swayed, and fell face downwards on the chamber floor as lifeless as the dead on whom her lips had called.

BOOK II.

CHAPTER I. "LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM."

THE Continental Express was dashing along over the dull, flat marshy country towards the lagoon bridge that connects Venice with the mainland.

To untravelled eyes, that long wide span of dull, smooth water, from which, as by enchantment suddenly rise the islands and towers, and palaces of the once famous Queen of the Adriatic, is a veritable fairy scene. Two such eyes looked at it now from out the window of a coupé. The sun had not yet risen; but over the quiet waters lay a pale, silvery haze that gradually melted into a flood of translucent gold.

From amidst this transforming orb a glowing ball of fire shot suddenly forth and mirrored itself in the rippleless calm of that glassy sea, and, as if by magic, the water changed and glowed, and broke into one radiant glimmering sheet of colour that spread further and further, till the watching eyes grew dazzled at its splendour.

Here and there a red sail, or a speck of white, or the black outline of a gondola or "barca" gleamed suddenly forth as the silvery mist was swept away, and the golden beams shot downwards in a million points of light that radiated from one great centre. The train rushed swiftly on, and the specks of fluttered canvas melted softly into distance till they looked no bigger than a bird's wing that blends itself into the light of sea and sky, and so vanishes, and is lost.

There broke a low cry—like a child's note of wonder from the girl who watched the scene. She turned to her companion. "Oh! but it is lovely—it is not like earth at all. It is as one dreams that Paradise will be!"

"It shall be Paradise for us," came the answer low and deep, as with the passion that stirs the heart and gives an eloquence to even simple words; "a Paradise that never serpent shall disturb—nor alien voices jar. Gretchen—sweetheart, come here and tell me you are happy."

"Oh! so happy," came from the trembling lips as she stole to his side, and nestled there with the sweetest, shyest grace that ever Love lent to woman. "So happy, that I wonder if I have ever—lived—till now."

"That is as it should be," he answered fondly. "And no one can drag you from me now, so we have nothing more to fear."

"I wonder if they are still angry?" said the girl sorrowfully. "Oh, I hope not; for now that I am so happy I cannot bear to think anyone else is sad—or troubled—or in grief. You posted my letter, Neale, from Vienna?"

"Yes, love, and told them that we were off to England and that I had married you, and intended to take better care of you than the Church would have done."

"Sometimes, I think," said the girl slowly and thoughtfully, "that perhaps aunt did care for me a little. She seemed so strangely moved that day when she spoke to me; but then," she added brightly, "she declared that all men were false, and evil, and cruel; and I know she was not right, though of course she did not know you; and I could not expect her to think you were different."

He bent down and kissed the lovely lips that still were shy of kisses, and rarely gave them back. "She was a hard and cruel woman, or she would never have wished to consign you to a living grave. Do not let us talk of these people, sweetheart. You have done with them now."

"Yes," said the girl softly; "still—one day, if you do not mind very much, and when we have been married some time, you know, I should like to go back and see them, and tell them I bear them no ill-will, and that I am sorry I left them so abruptly and secretly; and that they must forgive me, for I am so happy, and you are so good. I think they would be glad to know that, even though you are English, and carried me away in such a strange manner."

"There is plenty of time to talk of going back," said Neale Kenyon hurriedly. "I have hardly had you in my care yet. Only four days—what is that? You should have no other thought or wish but of me, my little one."

"Nor have I—in my heart," answered the girl earnestly. "But it is because I am so happy that I feel a little sorry for them."

"Do not let such thoughts vex you," he entreated, "or I shall begin to think that you regret what you have done."

"You could not think that," she said simply. "For you know you are first to me always now. It seems as if you never could have been out of my life, you fill it so completely."

A brief silence followed those last words. They were nearing Venice now. From out the wide, still waters rose the magic city—shining in the morning sunlight with something of the old loveliness that now is only a long past dream. It was wrapped in silence like that of a long forgotten world. The salt scents of the marshy shores stole in through the open windows—a great bell tolled heavily in the distance and startled the two dreamers, to whom life, as yet,

was only love. "We must be nearly there," said Kenyon. "I am sure you are tired, sweetheart. Journeying all night in these rattling, jolting trains is no joke. I wonder how you manage to look so fresh and fair after it all."

For Gretchen's was that happy kind of beauty that nothing seems to disturb. Her cheeks were as softly flushed as a child's; her eyes as bright; her glorious hair only the lovelier for its loose and careless arrangement. She had removed her hat, and the cool salt wind had blown it into a thousand rings and curls around her white forehead. Certainly no newly wedded bridegroom could have wished to look upon a fairer sight—despite the discomforts of travelling.

She drew herself away now from his arms and replaced her hat, while he fastened the long rich mantle, with its border of dark fur, around the slender form. Gretchen had been hastily equipped in Vienna for the journey, and, being quite ignorant of fashionable attire, the choice and ordering had devolved upon Neale, and he had acquitted himself very creditably. A simple cloth travelling dress and a rich mantle of plush and fur with hat to match, had transformed Gretchen into quite a fashionable young woman; and, despite what the proverb says about "beauty unadorned," believe me no man or woman either is capable of being unimproved by beautiful and artistic clothing. Gretchen in her grey linen dress had been charming; but Gretchen in velvet and furs, with her golden head and rich colouring, was simply bewitching. All the more so in that she was so utterly unconscious of her own charms, thus giving to her beauty its very crown of perfection.

Meanwhile the train steamed into the great, dreary station, and Bari made his appearance in the coupé to collect wraps and baggage. Giving him the keys, and leaving him the by no means pleasant task of waiting for the Custom House examination, Kenyon led Gretchen away to where the waiting ranks of gondolas lay in rows at the station steps.

To the girl it seemed the most wonderful sight possible. Before her stretched that still, wide, gleaming expanse of water. On the opposite banks were rows and rows of mildewed, dingy palaces, fantastic with carving and frescoes, and looming in dull sombreness of faded tints over the great lagoon.

But her wonder increased as their gon-

dola shot swiftly out from the surrounding crowd, and glided in weird, fashion over the reddened waters, and under the arched bridges, and through the narrowing threads of smaller canals.

How silent it was! how hushed! how solemn! Venice looked like a city of the dead in these early hours of the spring day. Not a soul was stirring in the narrow, paved footways. The casements of the houses were still closed. The spell of sleep lay on the silent streets through which the waters softly stole; and when the gondola shot suddenly forth again into the wider current of the Grand Canal, and paused before the striped poles of the hotel landing-place, it seemed quite strange to Gretchen that any ordinary, every-day being should be there to welcome them or direct them to their rooms.

The hotel had formerly been a palace. The entrance hall was paved with varied marbles, now dull of hue and worn by tread of many feet. Carved figures, rich in colouring, stood on either side the wide staircase, and great palms and bowls of flowers were placed in the dim recesses that led into the corridors. Like one in a dream, Gretchen noted all these things, as they followed their guide into a large square chamber with shuttered casements open to the water, and through which the morning sunlight gaily streamed.

Kenyon ordered some coffee to be brought them, and then, when the man had left, crossed over to the window and threw back the half-closed shutters.

"Look!" he said; and held out his hand to draw Gretchen to his side.

She gave a little cry of delight.

The wide sweep of golden water seemed to embosom an infinitude of tiny islands, and then spread and lost itself in the deep blue sea beyond. Before them, on the opposite bank, towered the lofty cupola and sculptured façade of a great church, and to right and left were other towers and domes, mingled with the red-brown roofs of houses; the masts and sails in the harbour; the foliage of some rare garden; the dusky, gliding shapes of gondolas carrying some freight of market produce from the Lido, or some devout worshipper to early mass.

It was a wonderful scene, a scene unequalled and alone amongst all the world's beauties, but to Gretchen's amazed and inexperienced eyes it was simply enchantment.

She gazed, and gazed, and gazed, with

a delight never satiated. Her colour came and went—the pretty, pouting lips parted in a thousand breathless exclamations.

Kenyon smiled at her enthusiasm.

"I have been here before," he said. "It is some years ago. I was quite a boy, but I saw it for the first time by moonlight. That is the time; the old palazzos want the fairy spell of night to keep up one's illusion of Venice as we have heard of her."

"It seems wonderful to me," said Gretchen sadly, "that I know so little of the world, or the places in it; and," looking suddenly up at him, "I should have known nothing had it not been for—you."

A little flush hovered over her cheek. A tiny dimple peeped suddenly as she smiled back at his adoring eyes.

"I can hardly realise it yet," she said softly. "Always to be together—always to love you and know you love me. Nothing and no one to come between us, and such a beautiful perfect life before me. . . . I think sometimes I am in a dream—a long bright delicious dream, and that I shall awake to hear Sister Maria's harsh voice, and see aunt's face, so cold and calm, frowning at me."

Her eyes turned to the golden waters, the smile died off her lips, and left them pale and grave.

A shadow crossed Neale Kenyon's brow. His heart seemed to contract with the sharpness of a sudden fear:

"Don't talk of such things," he said hastily. "How often am I to tell you that you are quite safe! There will be only happy days for you now, sweetheart. 'Together,' that is the word for us to remember. We are in a city of dreams, and we will dream our own in it. There is no need to wake and remember."

"You talk," she said softly, "as poets talk."

He laughed a little. "They say all men are poets when they love. Perhaps you have made one of me. I wish I could tell you how I love you, Gretchen!"

The sweet, shy colour that he loved to see swept over the fair face. Once more her eyes turned to him instead of to the scene before them; turned and drew his own to meet their gaze, as the sun draws the flowers.

"Neale——" she began. But a sudden, sharp rap at the door startled her, and made Kenyon draw back a little from her side.

It was Bari with the luggage and the

coffee. The invaluable valet opened the boxes; handed them their cups; suggested that Madame should remove her travelling wraps, and Monsieur retire to his dressing-room for his bath and shaving-water; in fact, brought all the prose of every-day life into a region of romance and an idyll of folly.

"Do you know," whispered Gretchen softly, as she took Kenyon by the lappet of his coat when the valet had withdrawn into the adjoining chamber, "do you know, Neale, I hate Bari!"

SOME CONFESSIONS: LITERARY AND OTHERWISE.

IN these days, when a father is perpetually scratching his head as he observes the rapid growth in age, stature, intelligence, and restlessness of his unconscionably numerous offspring, and posing himself with the problem of the future of the boys, it may be well if a devotee of literature give him the benefit of his experiences, in order that he may in good time put his fatherly foot upon the young hopes of his sons, and thus crush their callow aspirations, or may forewarn them impressively of the hard consequences of following the career of the pen.

It has its fascinations; that must be confessed.

Understanding the word "literature" in its largest sense, no career is so educative. In no career are the social advantages so considerable; for every reader of the writings of the man of letters becomes thereby an acquaintance of the writer, and, maybe, a friend. And in no career does a man feel such pleasure in receiving remuneration for his labours—so justly does he esteem himself entitled to such remuneration. Nevertheless, there is something of the rack in the life of the literary man; and, with all the vaunt about the delightful freedom that appertains to the literary career, in no other profession is a man such an absolute slave to his obligations.

At the age of twenty-three I cut myself adrift from my earlier life, and became a "littérateur." Hitherto I had never known what it was to want a five-pound note. I had now my future in my own hands, unaided by circumstances, and knew that it wholly depended upon my brain. I had had no training as a journalist, nor did I aspire to become a political medium between

the statesmen who drive the world and the people who, open-mouthed, are so ready to swallow whatever a newspaper writer sets before them. I pinned my destinies to literature, pure and simple.

For six months I studied and thought, tentatively. But, as the days went by and my resources lessened, the awful thought grew upon me that there was no room for such a novice as I in the world of letters. Well and good, if I were content to go into the rank and file, and obey orders for many a year to come. But as for origination—the faculty which had once seemed so strong in me, now seemed to be frightened away. Chill fears crept into my head in its place. When I was not at my books in the British Museum or elsewhere, I walked the London streets, and the sight of the thousands of harassed faces which confronted me wherever I went increased my own anxiety. In what one respect was I better than the owners of these faces? But yet I had thrown to the winds the assurance of prosperity which had been mine not a year ago, that I might teach and amuse these men and women of a troubled world, and make money at the same time! My head ached continuously with the burden of my folly and impudence, as I thought it. There was no consolation, except by recurring immediately to my work, and forgetting everything in that. I was alone, and kept my troubles to myself, of course. A Frenchman, similarly circumstanced, would have sought a comrade, if he were but a comrade in misery, and together they would have laughed, where singly they might have cried. But an Englishman has the pride of his birthright at all times. The consequence was that my isolation was every day the more thorough. I lived like one in a dream. Nothing seemed real to me, except myself and the work I had to do, but about the nature of which I knew nothing.

In this state of despairing egotism, a subject came to my mind, and for two months I worked as I had never worked before. A book was the result.

Now came my first acquaintance with the publishers. I was prepared to be treated as an intruder by these gentlemen, who have so extraordinary an influence over the lives of the reading public. I had made up my mind that slights at their hands were unavoidable. But, to my surprise, they were interested in the manuscript that I sent them—though interested in a Platonic sense only.

They thought the work was creditable; they would have liked to have been concerned in its publication; and so forth; but they did not think there was money in it, and so, "good morning." The seventh publisher, however, was kinder than the rest. He accepted the manuscript, and published it on the half-profit system.

The reviewers were civil, even complimentary. The "Academy" professed gratitude for the book; the "Athenæum" said it was a good work well done; and the "Saturday Review," after many a wholesome lash and not a few uncalled-for remarks of humiliation, ended its notice by referring to it as a pleasant and readable book. This, you will say, was fame at a stroke, and soon achieved. Maybe; but such fame is not bread, still less butter.

For a few weeks I smacked my lips over the newspapers and periodicals, and the compliments (oh, the bitter compliments!) of sceptical friends, who would not have given sixpence for the literary ability of Horace and Virgil put together. The world was really getting "couleur de rose" again. I could afford to hold up my head, methought.

But when a year had gone by from the time of my adoption of literature as a profession, and I realised that I had not earned a penny piece by my pen, serious thoughts revisited me—and no wonder.

After all, one must stoop to live, I had to confess. I would write newspaper articles of a style that should demand attention, and, while devoting to such work just the few hours per week necessary for the earning of two or three pounds weekly, I could continue my general study and schemes. Again, I was more lucky than I deserved to be. Though I kept aloof from politics, I found that my lucubrations were acceptable. For six months I wrote impressions of travel and people I had seen at a guinea the newspaper column. At the end of the time I received a letter from the Editor of the one newspaper saying that he had been much gratified by my contributions, and enclosing a cheque. He wanted no more impressions just then. And it was well, for I had really drained my memory to the dregs. As for the other paper (for I was contributing to two of them), it failed when I had begun to feel quite happy in the composition of the light "turnover" articles on "Prudence," "Poverty," "Genius," and the like, with which I favoured them. And so I sat face to face with an unpromising

future all throughout the second year of my apprenticeship.

But if I was not making money or any great amount of fame, I was little by little tutoring myself in what I pleased to call "the ethics of the literary life." I was becoming not a little cynical and heedless, and very much convinced that courage and effrontery are in literature, as in other paths of life, the chief recommendations for success. I was not at all, at any time, lachrymose like Keats; nor did I feel impelled to scoff at the world for not summoning me to a high position, at a high salary, on the strength of the one book which I had already produced. I realised, and it is a grand discovery, that though a man's self-esteem is greatly dependent upon the world's esteem, it is still more dependent upon himself. And, though I say it who should not, throughout my continued impecuniosity and uncertainty, I never failed to believe that there was something in me, if I could but know what it was.

Further reflection put me on a new tack. Everyone with whom I talked advised me to try fiction, as by far the most paying branch of literature. I knew that much, of course. Moreover, I had tried my hand at ghost stories and thrilling descriptions until now and then I fancied that I was veritably interested in my own manuscripts on re-perusing them, and that I could legitimately tremble over their harrowing or spectral problems. In the heat of a moment of peculiar self-respect, I sent a pile of nineteen stories, life-studies, and opuscules of a light kind, to a literary agent, for his criticism. His reply charmed me. "There is no doubt," he said, "that you possess great literary ability." Then followed a "but." Oh, these "buts!" Many and many a time, in the course of my literary correspondence, has this simple disjunctive conjunction been the link that has snapped, and let me down from heavenly hopes to abysmal despair and doubt. The literary agent strongly urged me to send him seventy-five pounds, and allow him to issue the manuscripts to the public in print. But no. I had determined from the outset rather to let my works accumulate on the shelves, than borrow money for their publication. I sent them to publisher after publisher until I was tired of paying postages and the cost of parcels' delivery. But I received no encouragement. There was a peculiar tone about the work that was not appreciated;

and, I may say it now, there was a little too much of my own devil-may-care mood permeating the pages. The work, in short, was not good, and nobody, save the literary agent, was in love with it. Only one of the nineteen sketches has since come into print, and I got fifteen shillings for it!

By this, I had lowered myself to starvation rations, or nearly so. I had been accustomed to pay my tailor twenty-five pounds a year. I paid him nothing at all now for eighteen months, and owed him nothing either. My humour grew tragic. Mind you, through all these petty distresses, I did not neglect work, nor did I seek resource or temporary exhilaration at the mouth of any spirit bottle; hence I was able to laugh at myself and my privations when the latter were really very annoying, and when I myself did not present a very laughable appearance. To be able to consider oneself impersonally, as it were, is a delightful gift almost peculiar to the literary life.

Well, in one of my tragic moments there came an inspiration—Write a tragedy. Many a man writes a tragedy without even feeling tragic. Do you suppose anyone knows more about tragic sentiments from general experience than yourself? I was bound to say "No" to this self-interrogation. In a trice a tragedy fit to grace the boards of the "Adelphi" flashed to my mind, and I hastened home with the precious bantling, to reflect and see what could be done with it. On the following day—such was the energy of my approval and the vigour of my conception!—I locked my door, and began at Act 1, Scene 1.

Dear me! Even now I can think with pleasure of the impetuous constitutionals I used to take during the time of my tragedy's evolution. I forgot my emptying purse for the nonce; forgot even that there were buttons off my coat, and that my boots wanted mending; forgot everything except the enthralling creations of my fancy. There was to be "love" of the most moving kind in my tragedy; and the fifth act was to be red with blood, and sparkle with impressive aphorisms about the superiority of virtue over vice. But as my creations began to live and move, and signify their being, they showed an aversion to murder and suicide which, on reflection, seems ingratitude of the basest kind. At the time, however, I cared nothing about that. And so eventually I wrote "Finis" on the manuscript, tied the pages together, sighed to think that I had parted for ever with such agreeable and inexpensive com-

panions, and sent the work to the manager of a theatre. It was a drama, not a tragedy.

For a few days my fatigued brain rested, and I lived on hope—that divine nourishment which is never followed by indigestion. Then came a polite demand for half a guinea from the theatre manager's secretary. After receipt of the money, the drama should be read. It was hard to part with the money; but I sent it. And in due time I received a somewhat lengthy criticism, dictated by the manager. From the nature of the criticism, and the return of the manuscript, I knew that I was not destined to go on the boards all at once. "Report on an original drama in five acts and twenty-four scenes:" this was how the paper was headed. And, after a good deal of merciless exposure of the incongruities of my men and women, and such absurd suggestions and comments as these—"a light comedy part should be introduced, and laughing writing infused;" "another walking lady is required in the cast, as your heroine could not be successfully doubled by any of the other ladies;" "the piece would be better re-written;" "the speeches are very prosy, although, on the other hand, the sentiment and argumentation is (in parts) good." After all this, the manager ended with a sugar-plum for me to make the most of—"Altogether, the drama is tame and uninteresting, but still gives promise that the author is capable of better work."

I had paid half a guinea to be told that my drama, which was intended to be a tragedy, was tame. A tame tragedy, forsooth! One might as well talk of tame fire. But so it was; and thus I had another Dead Sea apple in my mouth. I locked the drama out of sight, in company with my other manuscripts (for it irritated me to see the unappreciated work of my intellect), and returned to my books, well-nigh at my wits' end.

But the coil of one's life in youth has ever this gracious advantage over the term of one's later years—it is not monotonous. Something is for ever impending or happening. There is no dead season in one's twenties, be one's disappointments ever so bitter, or one's hardships ever so trying. And so, when it came to my ears that an excellent man, whom I had never seen, but who had taken an interest in me from an early age, had died and left me a small legacy, my spirits rebounded, and I was happy again. Heaven was rewarding my

patient persistence upon the path which I had chosen to pursue: and I was grateful.

The legacy was really a very trifling one, but I soon determined to use it in what for me was a serious venture. My writings hitherto had failed. Why? Because I was young and inexperienced. I needed to see something of the world. I could not, therefore, better invest this money than in taking a trip to America; for was it not generally acknowledged that the future of the world was bound up with the movements and multiplication of our transatlantic half-brethren? But, before setting out, I devoted a couple of months to a labour, the plan of which had come upon me as suddenly as my tragedy or my legacy. This was nothing less than a full grown novel of an unconventional kind. My literary shifts were hard earned. Wisdom had taught me that the man who can apply his moods discreetly has a genuine El Dorado in his brain. I resolved to turn to account, therefore, the elation which was mine in the prospect of my travels in the States; and so, like a donkey with a bunch of hay, reasonably, but not accessibly, near to his nose, I toiled at my novel on the strength given to me by sweet expectation.

If a man be the best judge of his own work, this novel was a brilliant success. I wrote it as a tornado writes its mark on the lands it traverses—with stormy speed. I enjoyed its humour while composing it, and afterwards. When not writing its continuation, I was reading what I had written, and questioning myself whether, after all, it would be advisable to leave England in the very heat of my fame, as it were. It were better, no doubt, to stay and take the tide at the flood. And I congratulated myself again and again on having in this accidental manner struck the very vein, the working of which was so congenial to me that it could not fail to please the public also.

To oblige a friend, I read a few extracts from my novel aloud, before sending it to the publishers. My friend said the humour was to his taste; but indeed he could not well have said less.

Three weeks passed. The manuscript was with the best publishers of London. What terms, I wondered, would they offer me? But, in truth, they offered me no terms. "The novel is clever and amusing"—their reader confessed, "but," said the publishers, "he does not on the whole encourage us to undertake its publication."

A fortnight later I crossed to New York by the ship "Arizona." "Those wounds heal ill which men do give themselves," says Shakespeare. Yes: because a man can never divorce himself from himself: the injured and the injurer are of necessity in each other's society at all times. But, in going to America, I left my manuscript behind me; whatever else I was destined to suffer, I would spare myself the sickness of heart and head which the very look of the discoloured and discolouring pages brought upon me.

Of my adventures in the States I will say nothing, save that they were, one and all, inspired by literary hopes. I am by nature phlegmatic in my person, and not very strong of constitution, but the gadfly of ambition gave me no rest. I had to pry into many nooks of earth and go among many companies of men and women (black and white), which inclination would have led me to avoid. I had also to face climates for which I was unsuited, and eat and drink strange compounds, which had a noxious effect upon me. As a result of all this, I fell ill of a fever, and for two grim months I lay tossing in bed, or crawled with diminishing strength up and down the sandy side-walks of the city in which I was prostrated. I suffered as I deserved to suffer. I had no one to console me. My landlord was a worthy fellow, but unsympathetic; and he amused me by telling me of the different Englishmen who had come South, and died in his house with symptoms precisely the same as my symptoms. My doctor was kind, but in my weakest moments he never forgot to make me search for my purse to pay him the two dollars he exacted as a visiting fee. My friends, when they wrote to me, rallied me about my illness, which they believed was a mere trifle, and they even doubted if I were really ill. Meanwhile, I grew weaker and weaker, and in my very low fits, when I could neither read nor sleep, I would think of the sandy cemetery outside the city, where the pines and magnolias towered high over the graves of many a forlorn stranger like myself, and whence during the wakeful hours of the night I could hear the booming hoot of the white-faced Southern owl; and it then seemed to me that my doom was settled, and that nothing remained for me to do but to die like a Briton. I remember in particular dragging myself to the wooden church of the city one Sunday night. The distance was about a quarter of a mile, and, by resting

against the big trunks of the evergreen oaks which lined the roads, I was able to get to the building in twenty minutes. I was late, but I obtained a seat, and, gasping for breath, and trembling from head to foot, I tried to follow the service. Once I stood up, it was at the Creed; but it was too much, and, all but in a faint, I sat down again, and kept a sitting position to the end. When the service was over, and the congregation were flocking out, weak though I was, it amused me and pricked the literary life that still throbbed within me, to see the fashions of the American dames, and the expressions of the faces of their bronzed, self-important husbands. I also rose and tottered into the aisle; but I could not go on. I had to stumble back to a seat, and had it not been for the good offices of a stranger—a doctor from Boston—who, from the pew behind me, had, he confessed, watched me with deep professional interest for the previous hour, I should have been forced to return to my sad lodgings on my hands and knees. This worthy doctor believed that I was almost at death's door—I was told as much by a disinterested acquaintance—and the advice of my own medical man, when next I saw him, seemed to confirm this belief. "Get home as fast as you can," he said. "The sea voyage might help you. You must not stay here any longer." I would have gone into the local hospital if I had been able, but it was full. For ten dollars a week they would give me a room, with board and medical attendance, as soon as possible, but they could not say when it would be possible.

I do not like to dwell upon this part of my life, though I avow that it was very improving in some respects. With the help of cordials, I returned to England, and fought out my illness victoriously, though physically it has proved to be a dearly bought victory. It was supposed that I could not make the journey by myself, and a young American lady came to my sick room one day and offered her services. For two dollars a day and all her expenses she would nurse me as if I were her brother, she said. I doubt whether sisters are better nurses than other people. But I remember laughing until I coughed with exhaustion, when the young woman made me this proposition. She was a pretty creature, and her curt American manner of speaking was very piquant; but I felt positive that she would make me marry her (bad bargain though she might have got

thereby), if she took charge of me in my weak condition. I thanked her and declined. With the meanness that does sometimes possess a lusty young woman, or even a woman not young, in the presence of an older or helpless person, she persisted, and bullied me cruelly. But eventually I got to Savannah, New York, and Liverpool, alone and unaided. Such was the outcome of the scheme of travel from which I had hoped so much!

Three years had elapsed. I was now worse than poor: I was in debt. Throughout the fourth year of my apprenticeship, I languished in ill-health, due to my American vicissitudes. From time to time, I sent my novel to a publisher. It was not accepted until three years after it was written, and until it had been cut and polished so that it was very dissimilar to its original. In all, it passed through the hands of nineteen different publishing houses. Two or three gave me criticisms upon it: and it was the germ of approval in these various notes that led me to spend my hours of convalescence in doing what I could to improve the work.

I was not idle during this year of sorrow; far otherwise. My conscience took every reasonable advantage of my powerlessness to preach to me: it gave me no peace. And it was after enduring a very bad quarter of an hour from this formidable, though intangible, part of my being, that, for the first time in my literary life, I took up the pen to some little profit. In two days I had written a brief record of one of my American experiences, and posted it to a high-class magazine. My illness had taught me the art of thinking; and "Cobbett's Grammar," which a friend had sent me for the beguilement of my lonely hours, had impressed upon me the importance of thinking before writing. The paper was accepted by the magazine, a proof of it came to me, and after the proof, a cheque for ten pounds. I assure you the cheque did me more good than all the pills and medicine I had been taking for the past six months.

Not long after this piece of luck, which was of course less estimable in itself than as a promise of good things to come, I was heartened in another way. The publishers of my first book sent me a statement of accounts, from which it appeared that there was at length a balance on the right side. The sum of seven shillings and sevenpence stood to our credit, divisible between the publisher and myself. Now I had grown

by this time into a state of contempt for the book which, with such mad haste, I had given to the public. I saw faults in every page of it. I could not open it without discovering a new fault. And yet the world had received the book so well, that, four years after its appearance, I was entitled to three shillings and twopence as my share of the profit upon it! I was confirmed in my opinion that "the world" is much less wise than it is generally believed to be.

With the fifth year of my literary life, I began to work in earnest, under guidance of my past unsuccess, my reverses, and a kindly spirit of judicious industry which seemed to have taken up temporary lodgment in my mind, in order to set me upon the track of a happy prosperity, at once and for all. I found that I had lost none of my old imaginative power, and that I had, during the latest year of my life, gained amazingly in discretion. My fancies were no longer allowed to run rampant at their own sweet will, when I took pen in hand. They were under the curb; and nevertheless they were none the worse for thus being controlled by what I might now venture to call the "reason" that was in me. Instead of having my manuscripts returned by the different Editors in the course of a post or two, I waited weeks and months, and so had the luxury of surfeiting myself on hope very much prolonged. Now and again, moreover, a manuscript was briskly accepted. "I shall be happy to use the paper you have been good enough to send me:" or, "I like your article on 'Siberian Crabs,' and will use it for the magazine, if you will cut it down two-thirds." These are samples of the letters I now got from Editors. It was the same with my bulkier writings. I gave myself little or no rest. As soon as one paper was done with, I folded my arms and meditated, or thoughtfully turned the pages of my numerous note-books until an idea worth hatching (if I may say) rested with me: and then I hatched it.

Occasionally, however, my sparrow became a turkey, or even an ostrich. In other words, a story which I had proposed to bring within the compass of twenty pages, swelled until I could not bring it harmoniously to an end in fewer than five hundred pages. Thus my earlier novels saw the light: and they too were despatched to famous houses without a moment's delay, and kept for consideration during what I could not but think a long time.

Formerly, I had been wont to rush at a publisher's letter, when I saw it on my table, as a whitethroat pounces upon a summer fly. But now I let nothing disturb or worry me. For the discipline's sake, I would even eat my breakfast with the seal or the envelope of some influential publishing firm unbroken by my plate. They had had a romance of mine, on which I had built high hopes, for eight or nine months, maybe, and this was doubtless the verdict. From time to time, in reply to my polite note reminding them that I was still held in suspense, they had perchance given me no less polite assurances that the novel was still under consideration: they felt a difficulty in coming to a decisive opinion about the work! And yet I was able to extend my torture voluntarily, and for the mere form's sake. I aver that this was a triumph over the unruly wills and affections that does credit to the literary profession.

Another valuable lesson I learned about this time was the fatality of desultoriness in work. One may be desultory over one's dinner to some good purpose, or even in the enjoyment of a holiday: but in writing for one's daily bread, never. In the infantine stage of my apprenticeship, I would never move towards the ink-pot unless I were impelled by a very vigorous inspiration, such as resulted in my tragedy or my first novel; and I would then write on and on with incredible disregard for the clock. As a natural consequence of this sacrifice of the body's well-being, my work had been uneven: the spark of genius was smothered in smoke. But now (and, I confess, not without a sigh) I gave up all pretension to the claim of genius. I cuffed and coerced the hapless ambition within me until it did not dare even assume a phantasmal importance in my dreams. When I had my work before me, I watched my mind's movements as suspiciously as a weak father watches the development of a strong and disobedient son. When my spirits capered, I let them caper: but I did not work until they had done capering. By these ruthless Napoleonic measures of self-suppression, I fitted myself for a successful pursuit of literature. Literature may well be feminine: she leads her votaries a pretty dance; and, once having caught her, there is no getting free from her.

I do not feel called upon to say much about the subsequent course of my literary life. The worst was over by this time. When I look back upon the past, and con-

trast it with the present; or, when I contrast my actual present with the present that might have been mine; I do not know that I can say, like Macaulay: "If I had to choose a lot from all that there are in human life, I am not sure that I should prefer any to that which has fallen on me. I am sincerely and thoroughly contented." I smile as I write these words; for, let my better nature say what it will, I am not "sincerely and thoroughly contented" at all times. But at any rate I do not "peak and pine." I could not afford to do this, for it would be a drain on my capabilities. I think, however, there is much of good to say for a profession, that keeps a man from the many odious temptations of ill-doing which assail the majority of men in other of the walks of life. Not that the man of letters moves in a charmed circle. Oh, dear me, no! But methinks it is some gain to be able to affirm that his battles are mostly with himself, and that it therefore rests with himself to get the forgiveness and encouragement after strife, which have so potent an effect upon the human energies. "To struggle is not to suffer. Heaven grants to few of us a life of untroubled prosperity, and grants it least of all to its favourites. . . . To be cloyed perpetually is a worse fate than sometimes to stand within the vestibule of starvation." So says De Quincey, discussing Oliver Goldsmith, and defending him from the fulsome pity which it was then the fashion to pour upon the author of the "Vicar of Wakefield." Pity Goldsmith because his life did not run on the primrose way, and because he died young! One might as well pity the swallow because the poor creature has no rest, and is forced to leave our little island ere the summer be well past. "Wife and children he had not. They it is, being a man's chief blessings, that create also for him the deadliest of his anxieties; that stuff his pillow with thorns; that surround his daily path with snares."

Aye, truly, there's the rub. And herein I confess is my chief grievance against my profession. I long ardently to marry a dear maid, to whom my heart is drawn by golden threads; but I dare not so much as by word, look, or deed signify that I have for her an affection stronger than that she excites in the heart of the rest of the world. I believe she admires me in a manner; I am an anomaly, and she would like to crack me to see if there be anything in me after all. If I were to offer her my poor, weather-beaten heart and my busy life, she

would crimson with pleasure, I feel sure: but, alas! the pleasure would be from conquest, not sympathy. She has all the virtues I ever hope to see combined in one woman; she is fair; and yet she is not for me, much as I love her. She must have a husband who can give her more of his life than a literary man such as I can afford to give her. She would soon be jealous, I fear, of my profession.

In conclusion (still for the profit of those for whom this brief paper was primarily written), I may confess that there hardly passes a day of my life on which I do not put to myself the question—whether the intense mental toil and concentration necessary for the continued successful pursuit of my profession may not be at length intolerable? And yet each successive day finds me at my table, pen in hand! I soothe my disturbed and rebellious fancy with the hope that as soon as the last vestiges of youth are gone, this “grind,” which is so opposed to Nature in the time of one’s buoyant and animal energies, will become a mere matter of routine, pleasant rather than unpleasant.

CHRONICLES OF SCOTTISH COUNTIES.

ELGIN AND NAIRN.

It is strange that Moray, no longer known on land as a working territory, should still remain in evidence upon the sea. The Frith of Moray testifies to the former existence of this important county, which once had the rank of a separate principality, if not of an independent kingdom. It is true that the county of Elgin is sometimes called Moray; but this forms only a small portion of ancient Moravia, which embraced the counties of Elgin and Nairn, part of Banff, and a solid portion of Inverness-shire. In a general way, the further north we get, the colder we expect to find the climate, the less generous the soil and its products; but in coming to Moray, all this is reversed. The great plain is so happily placed and sheltered, that it enjoys a milder climate than the rest of Scotland. It used to be said that Moray had fifteen days more summer than its neighbours—even forty days more were claimed by enthusiastic Moray men. And, in contrast with the bareness and poverty of much of the surrounding country, the abundance of Moray was celebrated by the old chroniclers. There was

“great plentie of wheat, barlie, otes, and such like graine, besides nuts and apples, likewise all kinds of fish, especially salmon.” And a later writer speaks of the “delectable plain whose comely gardens, enriched with corn-plantings, pasturage, stately dwellings overfaced with a generous Octavian gentry, and topped with a noble Earl, its chief patron, may be called a second Lombardy.”

As a set-off against this happy condition was the drawback of liability to heavy floods. Its rivers, which are fed by hundreds of mountain burns that become roaring torrents after heavy rainfall, are given to swift and sudden risings. The floods of 1824 found a graphic chronicler in Sir Thomas Dick Lauder, and, coming upon a time when periodic literature was taking its first start, these Moray floods became almost typical examples of such disasters. But, probably, there were bigger floods before those days, that nobody took the trouble to write about. There were famines, certainly, for the people of Moray depended chiefly on their grain, and when crops failed, there was nothing to fall back upon. Thus we read how, in 1743, called the dear year, the peasantry walked about the fields, half starving, and assuaged their cravings for food by chewing herbs and especially the wild sorrel; and there was another year of famine in 1782, known as the “frosty har’st,” when the corn would not ripen, and the rigours of an Arctic winter came, all out of season, upon the land.

In earlier times Moray suffered terribly also from the Highlanders. For the men of Moray were a distinct, and, as the Gaelic tribes of the hills considered, an intrusive race. The tenacious memory of the Gael retained the fact that in the old times these fertile plains had been theirs, and in plundering Moray they felt that they were only getting back a little of their own. But we shall have to go a long way back to find Celtic Moray. The district stood invitingly open for settlers from foreign shores, and even in the days of the Roman Empire, if we may trust the shadowy indications of the geographers of the period, it was inhabited by the Vacomagi, a people distinct from the Caledonii, who dwelt to the westward. Then we come to the Picts, of whose seven provinces Moray, with Ross, formed an important unit. But then recent theories resolve the Picts altogether into mere Highlanders, and the Pictish kingdom into a confederation of Gaelic tribes, which for a time contested the encroachments of

Scot and Saxon. Anyhow, when we first get a glimmer of light on the condition of Moray, it is ruled by a Celtic chief, who bears the title of Marmor. This is in the latter part of the ninth century, when Sigurd, Earl of Orkney, attacked and mastered the north of Scotland, including Caithness, Ross, and Moray.

Sigurd had fought and killed the Marmor of Moray, and was riding home in triumph with the head of his enemy hanging to the saddle-bow, when a strange accident happened to him. Wild and fierce was the head of the slain warrior hanging by its shaggy red locks, and strong protruding teeth gave the face an aspect of ferocity that death could not quench. It was as if the hatred that the Gael bore to his conqueror were indeed unquenchable, for with the swaying of the horse, the naked thigh of the Sigurd was struck and scratched by a projecting fang of the dead. The scratch proved the Earl's death wound; the poison from the Marmor's tooth spread through all his frame, and so he died in agony. Then his conquests were lost or partly lost, for the swaying to and fro of victory or defeat went on for centuries—incessant fighting, burning, plundering, murders, massacres, all of which went to the making of Scotland; as if it were a brew of all the poisonous ingredients of the witches' cauldron to be boiled down into good wholesome porridge.

We shall come to the witches themselves forthwith, for this is their very country, of which Macbeth was indeed the Marmor. He may have been Thane of Glamis also, and cousin to the King of Scotland; but it was as a Celtic chieftain that he became a formidable claimant to the throne. In the tragedy of Macbeth, Shakespeare follows Hollinshed's chronicle pretty closely, and Hollinshed borrowed wholesale from the earlier Scottish chronicles. In these the weird sisters appear with due dignity, and local tradition confirms the story of the apparition. "The exact spot," writes Chambers, "where the event is asserted by the country people to have taken place, is marked by a small clump of trees about two hundred yards north of the post road between Forres and Nairn, near a toll-bar five miles from Forres," and nearly on the county border of Elgin and Nairn, in a still, wild region called the Hardmoor.

The reign of Macbeth seems to mark the temporary predominance of the Gael,

and his overthrow the victory of the Sassenach. But Moray remained unsubdued till the following century, when its last Marmor was overthrown and slain. Till then Scotland had not extended beyond the Spey and the mountain chain of Drumalban. The Celtic population, however, would not submit to a rule which reduced them to servitude. A great revolt followed, and when this was suppressed by the superior arms and discipline of the Southern knights, a general clearance of Moray was resolved upon. The Gaelic population was driven away to the hills, and their lands assigned to a less turbulent and more industrious race. Flemings and Lowlanders were settled upon the plains—a precarious and uneasy settlement, for the Highlanders gave them no rest from raid and foray, and the King with his power was often set at nought in more serious invasions. At last, however, by cruel and vigorous extirpation Moray was pacified, and Alexander the Second kept Yule at Elgin for the first time in full security A.D. 1231.

The subjection of Moray had been powerfully aided by the religious communities settled there by pious Scottish Kings. The Priory of Urquhart has disappeared without leaving a trace; but Kinloss, which boasted a mitred Abbot and dignified establishment, still shows a ruined fragment of wall or tower above the low coast-line, and the quiet, melancholy estuary of the Findhorn river.

An unwelcome guest at the Abbey of Kinloss was Edward the First of England, who advanced to Elgin in force and occupied the chief posts round about. But, except for that visit, Moray was not much concerned in the Bruce's wars. Up to this time there had been no Earl of Moray; the district had been in the hands of the "custodes Moraviae," but Bruce appointed his faithful Thomas Randolph, Earl of the province, a title whose descent has known many vicissitudes. The Randolphs did not enjoy it long. Thomas's two sons both succeeded, and both were killed in battle without leaving descendants, and their sister, Black Agnes, famed for her defence of Dunbar, gave the titular dignity to her husband, Patrick Dunbar of that ilk, known as the Earl of Mar and Moray. The second son of this doughty pair had the good fortune to marry a daughter of King Robert the Second—King Blearie—and the Earldom of Moray was confirmed to him, but shorn of some

of its richest members in the districts of Badenoch, Lochaber, and Urquhart, which were taken to form a principality for a younger son of the King. This youth became unpleasantly famous as the Wolf of Badenoch—which is the south-east corner of Inverness-shire—and made himself especially obnoxious to the Bishop of Moray, whose Cathedral at Elgin he burnt about his ears.

The shrunken, but still valuable Earldom remained for two or three generations with the Dunbars, who then flickered out, and the Earldom was then granted to Archibald Douglas, who had married one of the Dunbars. The men of Moray had no affection for the Douglasses, and, in the wars that followed between Douglas and Stewart, they inclined to the side of the Crown. To punish them the Douglasses invited the Macdonalds to ravage the country, which they did with great good-will. Archibald Douglas was killed in a fight with the King's party, in Eskdale, on the western borders, the Earldom was estrated, and King James the Second came in person to pacify Moray. In the process he laid waste a great track of country to form a forest for his own hunting.

After a period of abeyance the Earldom of Moray was conferred on an illegitimate James Stewart, who died without progeny in 1544; and then, after a time, the Earl of Huntly possessed himself of the estates of the Earldom, while Queen Mary bestowed the title on her natural brother, James Stewart. Huntly was defeated and killed at Corrichie, as has already been told in the chronicles of the Gordons, in Aberdeenshire; and the new Earl became famous afterwards as the Regent Murray. The Regent, shot by Hamilton at Linlithgow, left two daughters, one of whom married James Stewart, of Doune, the Bonnie Earl of Moray of the ballad—

He was a braw gallant,
And he played at the glove;
And the bonnie Earl of Moray,
He was the Queen's luve.

This was the Earl who was killed at Dumbriess, or, according to modern spelling, Dumbriestle Castle, by the vengeful Gordons. The days of blood feuds, however, were passing away, and the Bonnie Earl's son was reconciled with the Gordons and married Lady Anne Gordon, from which alliance sprang the family that still hold the title of Earls of Moray.

Chief city of both Bishopric and Earl-

dom is Elgin, brightest and most charming of Scottish towns, lying pleasantly and securely on the right bank of the river Lossie. Old Elgin, indeed, has well-nigh disappeared, with its fine old houses—palaces, rather—of the local nobility, of a character unique and picturesque, with open piazzas leading to inner courts, and a play of light and shadow, but shadow chiefly, that might have delighted an artist's soul. But these old palaces, falling into the condition of slums, and being divided into miserable tenements, were, no doubt, uncomfortable and unhealthy, and it is useless to deplore their fate or to grumble at the brighter dwellings that have replaced them. The "muckle church of St. Giles," the oldest, and perhaps the most dilapidated, in the kingdom, has also been replaced by a commodious structure suitable for the simple offices of the Scottish Kirk. But the ruins of the Cathedral still remain, that proud citadel of the ancient faith, the ornament of the district, the glory of the kingdom, the admiration of foreigners.

It may be noted that, while the peasantry and farmers of Moray were attached to the Reformed Faith—more from political than religious leanings—yet nowhere was there a stronger attachment to the old faith and the old rites than among the gentry and upper classes of the district. And the once beautiful Cathedral of Elgin formed a central object for these affections and regrets. The lead might be torn from the roofs, and devoted to the sacrilegious cause—it was told with secret complaisance how the ship which carried the ill-omened burden sank with it in the deep sea, and was heard of no more—the choir might be ruined and bare, but still the sweet birds sang; the adherents of the old faith gathered around the broken shrine; mass was said; and echoes of the old worship hung about the ruined walls. Mass was said for the last time in the Cathedral A.D. 1594; but down to the reign of Queen Anne, at all events, the place was resorted to in secret by the Catholics of the neighbourhood with votive offerings; and who can say that, in the reign of Queen Victoria, the practice is not continued? The final ruin of the Cathedral was due rather to neglect than active malevolence. In 1711, on Easter Sunday, the central tower fell with a great crash—it is the ultimate fate of all such towers, the glory and weakness of the style—and in its fall it demolished

the nave and the greater part of the transepts. And there the ruins lay, a mere rubbish heap and quarry, for nearly a century, when an enthusiast took it in hand to clear the ruins, and was appointed curator of the site. A wall was built around the graveyard—full of monuments interesting and curious—and the whole is now protected and well cared for.

Everyone knows the saying, "Half done as Elgin was half burned," and this records the burning of the part of Elgin owned by the Douglasses, while the portion belonging to the Gordons, or their friends, was spared. This burning was done by Huntly, the conqueror of Earl Beardie, in the Douglas wars. The Douglasses retaliated, and attacked Huntly in his quarters, driving him out of the town, and killing many of the Gordons in the bog of Dunkinty, which lies close at hand to the north-west of the Cathedral. Hence the mocking distich,

What's come o' thy men, thou Gordon so gay?
They're i' the bogs o' Dunkintie, mowing the hay!

At an earlier period the Wolf of Badenoch laid waste the town and fired the Cathedral. Indeed, the position of the Bishop of Moray, surrounded by fierce intractable neighbours, was not a bed of roses. His spiritual weapons were not always effectual. Huntly, excommunicated, braved the terrors of his position, and threatened, if the interdict were not removed, to come and drag the Bishop out of his pigeon-holes. In reply to this threat the Bishop replied rather in the spirit of a Scot than a Churchman, that he would presently build a house that all the Gordons should not pull him out of. And thus was built Davie's Tower, called after its builder, David Stewart, the then Bishop—still a fine ruin upon the margin of the once famous Loch of Spynie, now drained and nearly all dry land.

In all these disturbances the once strong castle on Lady Hill took no part, for it had not been occupied since the days of Bruce's wars. The foundations of the castle still remain, and the curious shape of the Castle Hill, an artificial mound having apparently been raised on the summit of the natural hill, has given rise to a curious legend.

The castle, it seems was, in the misty "once upon a time," inhabited by a numerous garrison. The plague was abroad, and settled upon the castle, over which it could be seen to hover in the form of a cloud, light, but of a deep blue colour. The

inhabitants of the town, which had been hitherto free from the plague, consulted together and took the bold resolution of stamping, or rather smothering it out. They assembled with spades and picks, and covered the whole place deep in mould with all its inmates. But life still goes on in the enchanted castle, and faint sounds from the underground world may be heard by those who listen with faithful ears. Cocks crow in the morn; dogs bark and children cry; you may hear the mother crooning over her babe; horses neigh, and rattle their halter-chains; and the warder still tramps on the deeply-buried battlements. It is nothing to the purpose that recent excavations on Mary Hill have not led to the discovery of the subterranean community; for Elf-land is not to be reached by such common-place methods.

The long main street of Elgin, stretching a mile from east to west, may be followed in the latter direction to Forres, with glimpses on the way of the mouth of the Findhorn river and the ruins of Kinloss Abbey.

"How far is't called to Forres?" asks Banquo, just before he sees the weird sisters; and travellers may still look out for the witches' stone, which lies at the east end of the town, one of three that once commemorated the fate of the three witches who were burnt to death on Drumduan Hill. Close by is another curious sculptured stone, that bears the name of Sueno's Stone, and is said to record a victory over Sweyn, the brother of King Canute, and his Norwegians. But the aspect of the town is altogether modern and cheerful, as it lies on its terraced ridge surrounded by a rich and highly cultivated country, with hedges and plantations that give the place quite an English aspect. The Castle Hill, once occupied by Edward's soldiers, now shows the ruins of an eighteenth-century house, built, without counting the cost, by some over-ambitious laird. A most ancient burgh is Forres, with extensive corporate estates, among which is Clunyhill, a public resort laid out prettily in walks and plantations, with a glorious view from the summit of all the country round.

Beyond, still to the westward on the same line, lies Nairn, a bright, pleasant watering-place, wholesome and dry, with a fishing village attached, once divided almost equally between Gael and Sassenach. One of King James's pawkie stories, with which he mystified his English courtiers,

was about Nairn. "A place in my dominions sae long that the inhabitants of one end did not understand the language spoken at the other;" for the north-east part of the village was then occupied by English-speaking fishermen, while the south-west belonged to the Highlanders, who understood only Gaelic. Dr. Johnson, touring towards the Hebrides, visited Nairn, and fixed there the verge of the Highlands, for there he first saw peat fires and heard the Erse language.

Nairn was originally Inver-nearn, and the river Nairn was Uisge Nearn, or the Water of Alders, from the trees which shade its banks. Following the course of the river, we come to the famous Castle of Cawdor, the ancient seat of the Thane of that ilk. The title of Thane is of course Sassenach, and it is likely that Macbeth would have been hailed by the witches, who probably spoke Gaelic, as Toisach of Cawdor, that being the Celtic title which Saxon tongues translated into Thane. But anyhow, the Thane, or Toisach, of Cawdor was the great potentate in those parts, and his possessions, stretching into the neighbouring counties (if we may thus speak of them, like General Wade's roads, "before they were made"), led to the patchy condition of Nairn as a shire, with three detached fragments in Elgin, and a piece in Inverness, as well as another in Ross.

A Campbell, offshoot from the great Ducal house of Argyll, is now Thane of Cawdor, and, how the Thanedom originally came into the far-stretching hands of that powerful clan is told in a pleasant legend, which contains, no doubt, a considerable seasoning of veritable history.

In 1498, the last of the ancient line of Thanes of Cawdor died, and left an infant heiress, Muriel Calder, on whose frail life depended the succession to the broad estates of the house. The old tower of Cawdor was strong and high, and half-a-dozen stout uncles—her mother's brothers, no doubt—kept jealous guard over the precious life of the babe, whose fluffy locks already, in their glowing hue, betrayed her Gaelic ancestry. In these days, to win an heiress, one must wait till she is of marriageable age; and then it is an affair of ball-rooms and garden parties, pleasant meetings at country houses, and the like, combined with judicious family negotiations. But our forbears had rougher and readier methods. The Campbells had their eyes upon the fair lands of Cawdor, so convenient to extend their grip upon the

Highlands. And thus, in the year after her father's death, when the little maid could just run alone, sixty grim Campbells lay in ambush about the tower, and, discovering little Muriel walking abroad with her nurse, pounced upon them and carried off the child.

The alarm was given; the bold uncles rode off in hot pursuit; they overtook the Campbells before the fleet-footed Highlanders could reach the shelter of the hills. They would have rescued their little ward but for the presence of mind of Campbell of Innerliver. Among the impedimenta of the raiders was, it seems, a huge camp-kettle, big enough to boil the porridge of the whole party. This was overturned upon the grass, and Campbell, posting his seven sons about it, bade them defend it with their lives. The seven youths stood boldly to their post, and the pursuers, judging that they were defending the precious spoil they had carried off, attacked these first. The seven sons of Innerliver were slain, the kettle was carefully turned over, but there was no babe beneath it; and, by that time, the rest of the Campbells were safe among the hills with their prize.

It is said that Muriel's nurse, retaining her presence of mind in the first alarm, had bitten off a joint of Muriel's little finger, so that there might be no chance of a supposititious heiress being foisted upon the house of Cawdor. The precaution was not superfluous, for when it was suggested to a chief of the Campbells how awkward it would be after all this trouble if the child should die—"She can never die," was the reply, "as long as a red-haired lassie can be found along Lochawe." Nor would it have been difficult, perhaps, to have found a clansman of powerful jaw who would have made little difficulty in giving the proper tooth-mark.

The little lady of Cawdor House did not die, and at twelve years old she was married to Sir John Campbell, third son of the second Earl of Argyll; and that was how the Campbells came to be Thanes of Cawdor.

The castle itself is a fine specimen of the ancient barons' hold, built on a commanding brow, with a fine old square tower flanked by pepper-box turrets, and beneath, a long, grim-looking range of buildings with windows high in the massive walls. Tradition, too, has been busy about the building of Cawdor Castle. An ass, laden with gold, was driven forth to choose a

site for the new stronghold, and halted obstinately under a spreading hawthorn tree. About the hawthorn tree the castle was built, and there stands the tree to this day in the very basement of the castle, its strong arms thrust into the masonry in a way that shows that on this head at least the popular story was well founded. At Cawdor, as at Glamis, there is a hidden chamber, the existence of which should only be known to a faithful few. In this room Lord Lovat was concealed, it is said, in 1746, but grew tired of his captivity, and preferred to face his doom on Tower Hill.

The muniment room of Cawdor possesses a goodly collection of archives, a selection from which was published in 1859 by the Spalding Club, of Edinburgh, under the title of the "Book of Cawdor," of great value to the painstaking student of the manners and customs of the Scots of the last few centuries.

A pleasant book, too, is Lachlan Shaw's "History of Moray," the original quarto edition of which, published in 1775, is somewhat scarce. The Rev. Lachlan Shaw was a minister of the Scotch Church, and a scion of the Shaws of Rothiemurchus, the last a name that suggests at once the Highland piper and the celebrated Rant; and, with such connections, it is no wonder that the good minister is skilled in Highland genealogy, and behind the scenes in the quarrels and punctilios of the Highland clans. One of his stories of a Highland feud is too characteristic to be passed over, although it only indirectly concerns Moray.

John Munroe, tutor of Fowles, on his return from Edinburgh, where he had been on some legal business connected with his trust—for the tutor in Scotch law is simply the legal guardian of an estate—passed through Moray, and, tired with his journey, saw a pleasant meadow lying by the wayside with soft turf and quiet shade, inviting repose. Here he dismounted with his one faithful henchman and attendant, and, stretching himself out on the grassy bank, presently fell asleep. It might have been the duty of a faithful henchman to have watched while his chieftain slept; but they were in a friendly country, the way had been long, the day was hot, and the servant was soon asleep by his master's side, while their horses browsed quietly beside them. Presently the owner of the field came along, evidently a man who had no notion of generosity or hospitality, and finding two

rough-looking Highland chieftains—who might be drovers or horse dealers—trespassing upon his meadow, he determined to give them a lesson, and cruelly enough cropped their horses' tails to the stump. When Munroe awoke and saw what had been done, the indignity, even more than the injury he had suffered, sank deeply into his soul. Away he rode homewards, and speedily raised his clan, and presently three hundred Munroes, burning to avenge the insult done to their chief, poured into the vale of the pleasant meadow.

The dalesmen saved themselves, no doubt, for we do not read of any slaughter being done, but they lost their cattle, which were seized and driven off by the Highlanders. Thus far all was straightforward enough: the Lowlanders had enjoyed their joke, no doubt; the Highlanders had their spoil; and the affair was complete. But in returning to their own strath with their cattle, they passed along the country of the Macintoshes, the chief of which clan espied them as they crossed the hills. Now, according to Highland etiquette, when one gentleman drove his spoil across the lands of another, a certain compliment was due—a "Stike Crieach, or Road Collup," as Shaw expresses it; in other words, a certain portion of the booty. The Macintosh was naturally a little indignant that his friends should try to steal past without paying him the accustomed civility; hence, perhaps, the message he sent in demanding his right was more peremptory than courteous. The Munroes acknowledged that something was due, but considered his demand extortionate, and returned a message of an insulting nature. Macintosh full of anger, raised his clan, pursued the Munroes and overtook them at Clachnahurie, near Inverness. The ground was covered with rocks and boulders; the Munroes were skilful bowmen, and concealed behind the rocks they made great slaughter among their pursuers, and eventually secured their retreat with all their spoil. In this skirmish Macintosh was killed, and John Munroe was hurt, so that he went lame all the rest of his life.

Our friend Lachlan also lets us into the secret of how battles were lost and won on the skirts of the Highlands. That battle of Glenlivet for instance, when the Campbells went down before the Gordons: there Lord Huntly had field pieces, and many of the other army had never seen artillery, —and then "Lochinell (whose brother

Argyle had put to death for murdering Campbell of Calder, anno 1592, who was Argyle's nearest heir) had wrote to Huntly to point his artillery against the yellow standard." Why, it is hard to see, for Lochinell was himself slain by the standard, while Argyle escaped—but such intricacies can only be understood by Highlanders.

Then there was the battle of Aldern, between Montrose and the Covenanters in 1645. There "Major Drummond, called The Crowner, wheeling about unskilfully, broke the footmen of his own side." He was tried at Inverness, and was shot for this ill conduct, which had cost the lives of eight hundred Covenanters, and given Moray over to the spoiler.

OUR AVIARY.

It was not a very expensive matter to set it going. We saw a Crystal Palace cage advertised in "Exchange and Mart," price twenty-three shillings, sent a post-office order for the amount to the address given, and in due time our birds' home arrived in safety. This was one point gained. We then ordered the carpenter to make a plain deal stand, so that the cage could be raised to the level of the window-ledge; purchased canary, rape, millet, and hemp seed; filled the drawers; bought and supplied with water an elegant bird-fountain, and our aviary was complete—with the exception of some feathered things to live in it.

These soon grew into a delightful collection—beginning with small things—like a snowball, and gradually attaining size and proportion.

First of all came a kind friend's gift—two slender, saffron-coloured canaries, as full of impudence and curiosity as it was possible for birds to be. Into every nook and cranny of the cage, that must have seemed like a veritable Crystal Palace to them, did they peep and pry. They even pecked at the fastenings of the doors, as though they had a mind to try further wanderings. These worthies were duly christened Bertie and Day, and became, as it were, the "oldest inhabitants" of the aviary.

The next I got was a remarkably fine cock bullfinch, whom we named Sam. At first he sulked terribly, huddled himself up like a bundle of feathers in one corner of the cage, and half the time kept his head under his wing. Then was seen in its perfection the curiosity that

possesses the soul of every canary. The two yellow slender things went gently up to him on either side, pecked at him in a tentative manner, and looked at him with their heads on one side, as who should say, "Is this bird only a stuffed specimen from which no manners can be expected, or is this demeanour an intentional insult?" The bullfinch, evidently aware that the impertinent creatures were trying to see what he was made of, suddenly lifted his head, opened an immense black mouth at them (which sight sent them flying); roused himself to energy; bathed; partook of a hearty supper of hemp seed; and took his place upon one of the perches, swelling out his salmon-coloured breast to abnormal dimensions, as much as to say, "what do you think of that for a waistcoat?"

A hen bullfinch—Eliza by name—was now added to our collection, and of her I have a strange and most mysterious tale to tell. From some cause, or causes, unknown, Eliza lost her elegant smoke-coloured tint, and became, absolutely and literally, "as black as the pot." Her fame went abroad, and bird fanciers and others came to look at the "black bullfinch." If Eliza had been trying to pass herself off as a crow she could not have been blacker—wings, breast and all—and I should be very glad if any readers of this magazine can suggest a reason for such an extraordinary metamorphosis, or tell me of any similar case. One hears of the pride with which people become the possessors of a white elephant, and surely I may be permitted to confess to a feeling of gratified vanity in the possession of a black bullfinch.

Our next acquisition was a pair of weaver birds, yeleft "Mr. and Mrs. Chow-Chow," from a habit the cock-bird had of favouring us with that imbecile ejaculation every few moments or so. For a long time Mr. Chow-Chow was what might be called "cock of the walk." Where the other birds fought and pecked one another to get possession of any dainty morsel, Chow-Chow only came, and at sight of his rose-red bill and sharp, black eyes, away the others fled. We provided Chow-Chow with plenty of garden-matting torn up into fine strips, and he forthwith set to work and built himself houses and barns, using the wire sides of the cage for the foundations of these airy dwellings, which were most deftly and ingeniously woven together, and had a very pretty appearance, seen from outside. However, having constructed them, Chow-Chow took no more

heed of them, and they were left for the other birds to fight for as roosting places—a proceeding they never failed to carry out every night.

Three little redpoles came next to take up their abode in the aviary, and soon became a source of never-ending amusement to us. They went by the name of "the three Miss Smiths," and were all so much alike we could not tell the one from the other. They had strong gymnastic tendencies, and one had a trick of flinging herself head over heels off the highest perch, and coming up right end uppermost after the plunge, that any acrobat might have envied. Another would dance upon the perch like a Taglioni, springing into the air, and pirouetting in marvellous fashion.

We then bought a pair of Java sparrows from a travelling bird-catcher, and added them to the crew. A tragedy followed. Nebuchadnezzar (so-called from his passion for green stuff) did not, evidently from the first, appreciate his wife. She was a mangy, unhealthy-looking bird with a paucity of feathers; indeed, we began to fear that the peripatetic bird merchant was a man by no means actuated by the highest principles. One morning the lady was found lying dead upon the cage-floor, while her heartless lord was joyously spluttering in the bath. From that day to this, Nebbie (we called him Nebbie for short) has laboured under suspicion of wife-murder. Be this as it might, he bore his remorse, if any, in a jaunty manner, and took cheerily to the life of a gay old bachelor, with decidedly greedy tendencies. The whole aim of Nebbie's life is to get as much as he can for himself, and keep as much as possible away from anybody else. He is a tall, lanky bird, and may be seen straddling across the small glass dish that holds the hemp-seed, so as to keep it all to himself and prevent the others getting at it while he gorges.

The end of the reign of King Chow-Chow came on this wise.

We bought a pair of Australian love-birds. They were like Cæsar. They came, they saw, they conquered. Their hooked beaks, and long green tails were too much for everybody. Whatever they wanted, they took, and their companions fled while they consumed it.

It must make life a very easy thing, one would think, this continuous and effortless victory over one's fellows, but perhaps it is hardly wholesome, for our green paro-

quets have got into a dreadful habit of preaching, and earned for themselves the dual sobriquet of "Moody and Sankey." This preaching on their part—carried on with vast gesticulation and wonderful flutterings—seems to have a solemnising effect upon the rest, as though the long-tailed speakers opened each discourse by asserting themselves in the familiar fashion, "and when we speak, let no dog bark." These potentates in green and gold have a delightful way of enforcing discipline, which appears to be thoroughly effectual. When a bird is contumacious or quarrelsome, they take him gently but firmly by the wing and swing him to and fro in mid air. When let go, he seems to be at once a sadder and a wiser bird.

Nor is this their only accomplishment, nor yet by any means the most awe-inspiring. These curious birds sing with their heads beneath their wings! Can it be wondered at, that the sight of a headless bird singing his best, singing into himself as it were, should strike terror into yellow, speckled, or salmon-coloured breasts? Even upon myself the effect was, at first, rather unpleasant. I looked and looked again. Could I believe my eyes? Was that headless green body producing that ceaseless, twittering song? Yes: for I saw the long slender tail vibrate to each trilling cadence; I saw the whole bundle of feathers jerk and tremble as the song grew louder and louder. Apparently the bird was asleep—singing in his dreams—and, at last, woke himself with his own song. Meanwhile, the canaries were greatly agitated: hopping now on this side of the songster, now on that: stretching out their yellow necks, uttering long sweet notes of wonder, and even pecking him gently. They have grown more used to his habits and customs now, which is a good thing, since one or other of the paroquets is generally singing and dreaming in this curious manner, as evening comes on.

Our next additions were a pair of green linnets, rather sleepy, peaceable birds, who sing in a soft, subdued kind of way, and devote much of their time and attention to the seed-boxes.

I see I have omitted to mention one very reprehensible habit on the part of "Nebbie." So greedy is he of green food, that he stands upon as much of it as he can drag down, while he gobbles at the rest, always reminding me of certain old retired Generals and Colonels at the military clubs, who are said to sit upon two

or three newspapers while they read another, and thereby aggravate their compeers to an almost unbearable extent. Nebbie aggravates his compeers. Indeed, he is—I own it with a sigh—full of faults to a distressing degree. He has murdered his mangy old wife—he is greedy, avaricious, unamiable; he gets bodily into the bath, which is only just big enough to hold his clumsy body, and pecks at the others over the edge; he has no redeeming qualities—and yet—

Nebbie! with all thy faults,
I love thee still!

It must be that in his consummate impudence lies a charm.

Speaking of impudence reminds me to chronicle the fact that, when the hen-canary was sitting, she used to stoop down from her nest high in the corner of the cage, and pick out a feather from some comrade perched beneath, calmly appropriating it to assist in lining her soft, warm bed. On one occasion she dared to steal a lovely green feather from one of the paroquets; but she almost dropped it at the screech he gave; not quite though, for I saw it myself carefully laid at the bottom of the nest.

Spending much of my time as I do sitting well within view of the aviary, many interesting lights and shades of bird life and bird character have become known to me.

I have recognised the fact that birds differ from one another in character, just as human beings do; that each bird has its own little ways, its own little fads and fancies, just as you and I have; and that similarity of faces by no means necessitates uniformity of characteristics. I have a bullfinch that is genial and urbane, that I am quite sure would not hurt a fly; and one that is jealous of every creature that is not himself, and who, just like jealous people amongst ourselves, makes misery and wretchedness for others as well as for himself. At times he becomes so unbearable, that the others fall upon him to his sad undoing, and, limp and draggled, he has to be taken out of the big cage and put into a little one until his temper is cured by solitary confinement, and his wounds healed by time.

There are times of rest, and times of activity, in the bird-life of each day. The morning is all twitter and flurry and hurry; the seed is eaten; the groundsel or chickweed, or cut apple, taken greedily. Then comes the bath; such a spluttering and fluttering; such pushing one

another aside; such jostling and chattering! Water-spray flies about everywhere; some throw it higher than others; some are lazy, and take their stand where they are sprinkled only by the exertions of others. Timid birds, afraid of the depth of water of the pink-glass lake in the centre of the cage, will constantly do this, deliberately stationing themselves where the spray falls thickest. After the general bath comes the general drying; a most delicious rustling and ruffling of feathers; and this is followed by delicate and fastidious attention to details of the toilette, each smallest feather having to be manipulated by the cunning little beak that knows so well how to be brush and comb in one.

Towards the hour that is in summer the hottest—i.e., about four of the afternoon—a strange quiet settles down upon my bird-world. Sometimes they are so absolutely still, each bird sitting squatted on the perches, with puffed-out breast-feathers, that the aviary might almost be taken for a case of stuffed birds. The bullfinch will make an ugly mouth at you if you disturb him in this siesta of his, but he will hardly budge unless you push him; the canaries have their heads under their wings, and look like a couple of fresh-made cowslip balls, balanced on the bar; it is the hour of lassitude and rest—the hour that corresponds to the “noontide sleep” of the Oriental.

It passes, and the little feathered denizens of the wire-bound world wake up, eat and drink, flutter and fly; and then a “service of song” sets in, a sweet good-night, harmonised for many voices, in which, though each sings a different note and time, is no discordance.

Bed-time, which follows upon this, is a period of some trouble. There is delay in “settling down,” since everyone wants to sleep in the airy structure woven by “Mr. Chow-Chow’s” busy beak, and the said structure will only hold one. As a rule, each bird in the aviary sets himself up on high there in turn; and is in turn thrown down by another bird. In a contest like this weight tells, and Nebbie generally remains in the end in peaceful possession of the coveted shelter.

One fact about birds is most strongly impressed upon my mind as a consequence of my long study of “Our Aviary,” and that is, what thirsty little souls they are. Just keep the water-dish out of the cage for a bit, and then you will see. They almost touch the hand that replaces it in their

haste to reach the haven of their desires; they shove and push, and even trample upon one another to get near it. With what ecstasy the little beaks are dipped in for the cooling draught, and the pretty heads lifted to swallow, as if returning thanks to Heaven for one of its best gifts!

The sight makes one think of some still, clear pool, hidden in the soft, green recesses of a wood, and of what a fair sight it must be to see God's creatures, great and small, come down to drink from its bosom, where the tree shadows show so beautiful, and the wild flowers on its brink find a mirror.

What a fount of joy, what a well-spring of delight must that hidden pool be to the birds of Heaven in the early morning, when the dawn first touches its surface into brightness; when the noonday sun turns it into gold; and when the shadows of eventide make it deep and dark with the shadows of the clouds that float above it!

Dwelling upon these beautiful "aspects of nature" with our mind's eye, the words of the "Sweet Singer of Israel" come home to us, ringing out clear and true across the vista of the centuries that are past—giving us that most perfect portrayal of peace and rest and uttermost content—"He shall lead me beside the still waters."

THE SHEPHERD OF THE SALT LAKE.

A STORY IN THREE CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER III.

SUMMER waned, and the autumn came with a breath of freshness and a sobering touch, that lent a fuller charm to the mulga ridges, and chastened the sun's heat with gentle breezes. Its first month brought no new experience to the two lonely dwellers by the Salt Lake, further than that testified by the change in their surroundings. They lived their solitary life—undisturbed, except by the rare visits of the sheep overseer from the head station—pursuing a daily routine that seldom altered. The old shepherd fulfilled his trust to the uttermost letter. He scarcely ever allowed the child out of his sight. He made her a bunk in his hut, and every night undressed her, and remained by her till she had fallen asleep. He looked after her with a tenderness her own mother could not have surpassed. His quiet flock required little care, of their own accord they would come

and go to the yards at the accustomed time; and so he was able to devote himself almost entirely to his little charge. No act of his that could give her pleasure was too much trouble for him. He lived in the child. Her slightest wish was law. Almost the whole day was spent in trying to amuse her.

At first little Lizzie enjoyed to the utmost the liberty and independence of her new life. She had no lessons to do now—no reading or spelling. And Scotty cooked her nice things. She could have as much "brownie" as she wanted. It was very nice to have so much cake; and sometimes he made her "lolly" from the brown ration sugar. Then he got her luscious currajong roots—bush cocoanut, as he called it—and wild fruits and berries, and nice sour binil grass. It was all very pleasant at first, and Lizzie felt herself a veritable queen. Scotty would do anything she asked him—make her toys, and tell her stories, and carry her pick-a-back when she was tired, and catch a sheep for her to play with, and hold her hand at night till she fell asleep. But soon the solitude began to weigh upon the child's spirits. She longed for her father and mother again, even for the sound of the hammering and the ring of the axe-strokes, that used to make her head ache so. The bush was so silent now, that sometimes it frightened her, and even the battering of the mawl on the iron wedges would have been a welcome change. As the days dragged on their weary length, this feeling became stronger and stronger. The child began to pine for other companionship than that of the half-witted old man; the very intensity of his affection became irksome to her.

And so the first month of autumn passed, and then a sudden change came to the mulga ridges and the silent Salt Lake. The wet season was unusually late that year, but when at last the rain did set in, it fell in unusual quantities. For two days it came down in an almost continuous down-pour, and then cleared off, only to recommence in lighter showers. During that time little Lizzie was confined to the hut; and a weary, weary time she found it. The old shepherd would take advantage of any temporary break in the weather to let his flock out, in order that the sheep might pick up a mouthful; but he would not allow Lizzie to accompany him, fearful of her getting wet.

The rain came down, and the patient

sheep stood nearly all day long with hanging heads under lee of the brush yards; the mulga ridges and the Salt Lake were blotted out; the air was heavy and moist; and the hut was so dreary that poor Lizzie, used to being out in the fresh air all day long, hardly knew what to do with herself. All Scotty's efforts failed to amuse her any longer. She longed for some change in her dull life; she sighed for the return of the sunshine, for her father and mother to come back again.

It was better when the rain cleared off, and the warm sun came out again, and made everything bright and pleasant. As though by magic the mulga ridges, with the stony hollows between, assumed a new appearance. Two days of bright weather were sufficient to bring the sweet-smelling herbage out, and to cause the grasses to put forth their tender green shoots. Pools glistened in the hollows; the red loam—before so parched—was moist and soft, and exhaled a fresh earthy smell that mingled with the more delicate perfume of the young herbage. The mulga trees assumed a fresher green; the drooping fronds of the tall peppermint trees dripped a resinous thanksgiving for the fresh nutriment their spreading roots sucked up; even in the patches of scrub the rain seemed to have washed off some of the dinginess. All was bright and fresh, and Lizzie, freed from her imprisonment, forgot, for the time, her weary longing and impatience.

The two were seated, one day, near the gibbera hole, now overflowing and filling the narrow gully. The sheep were scattered along the edge of the Salt Lake, nibbling greedily at the tender young herbage that had sprung up, as it were, almost by magic.

Old Scotty was gazing out at the desolate waste of the Salt Lake.

"Why are you looking like that?" asked Lizzie curiously, laying her hand on the old man's knee.

"I'm thinking what a terrible place it is," he answered mechanically. "Look at it. It's nothing but a steaming bog. And see, it's trembling and shaking like a hungry thing. It's hidysus."

The lake presented a strange appearance. A grey exhalation, drawn out of the rain-sodden, spumy soil by the heat of the sun, partially hid its surface; through it the salty incrustations glittered with a strange colourless shimmer. It may have been the vibration of the heated air, or it may have been the quivering of the rising mist, but

the whole surface of the lake seemed to be trembling and shaking.

"Ay; it's the curse," muttered old Scotty fearfully. "It's a drefful thing to see it; it drors the life out of you. It's always worse after the rain."

"Couldn't you walk across it now?" asked the child, gazing with a shudder at the misty waste.

"Walk! It's nothing but a hungry bog that would swallow you up. Nothing dare go on it now, after the rain. See how the sheep keep away from it. They know what a hidysus thing it is—and I know it too. Look at it shaking. Come away, child, or it'll blight you the same as it has done me."

The next day, as they were returning with the sheep, towards sundown, the crack of a whip, in the distance, suddenly broke the stillness of the bush.

"It's mother and father!" cried Lizzie, with a joyful cry. "Oh! they've come back at last."

She ran in the direction of the sound, leaving old Scotty to yard the sheep. Soon the creaking wheels sounded near at hand, and the dray slowly came into view, surmounting the last of the mulga ridges. When it stopped at length, before the tent left standing by the fencers, the little girl, weeping bitterly, and with her hand clasped in that of Duke's mate, approached the old man.

"They've not come," she cried, sobbing pitifully. "It's only Larry come alone."

The man nodded to Scotty, and gave him the usual bush greeting.

"Yes, I'm by myself this time, Liz," he said. "But don't you cry. I've come to take you to mother."

"To take her away!" cried Scotty in a scared voice.

"Ay. Her mother's waiting for her at Gidanga. But I'll turn out the horses first. They've had a heavy time of it. I was near bailed up by the rain. Them mulga ridges are as soft as butter now; it was as much as the horses could do to pull the empty dray. They'll be glad of a spell."

He unharnessed the horses, and then, leading them down the gibbera hole for water, hobbled them out. Scotty watched him as though in a dream. It had come to an end, then, at last! The child was to be taken away from him. Their happy life together was over. He would see her no more; hear the sound of her voice and her happy laughter; hold her hand in his;

watch her untroubled sleep, no longer. She was to be taken from him. His feeble mind had hardly realised that such a day must come, in the end. Happy in her companionship, he had never thought of separation. It had seemed as if their peaceful, happy life must go on for ever. And now the evil day had come. He was to lose her. A terrible despair—all the more powerful by reason of its dreadful suddenness—took hold of him. Heart and brain felt numbed and stupefied. He uttered one hoarse cry; but that was all. His grief and despair were too deep for outward expression.

That evening, when little Lizzie had been laid tenderly to rest by the old shepherd, the fencer told his story.

"I didn't tell her," he said, seated on a wooden block before the fire, "because I didn't want to frighten her. But there's been an accident. Poor Duke's dead—crushed under the wheel of the dray. It was at the Culgoa crossing. There wasn't much water in the river, but the crossing-place is a bad one. I was in the dray holding his missis up, preventing her from being jolted, for it was nigh on her time, and she was very weak. The place was pretty steep and rough, and he was leadin' the horses down. There isn't a brake to the dray, and the leader fell, coming down on him. The wheel went right over poor Duke, crushin' his head in. He was dead when I jumped down and pulled him out. He never moved. It was orful sudden, poor fellow."

The old shepherd listened as though in a dream. He was dead, then—her father—and still they wanted to take her away from him.

"I took his missis into the township," Larry continued, "and poor Duke's body too. She had a bad time of it, poor soul; but I got her in safe to the doctor's, and she's there now. She's got a child—a boy, and I've come out to take little Liz to her. She isn't comin' back here now her old man's killed, and I ain't either. I've given up the fencin' contract, the boss allowing me and her for what work me and Duke did. She hadn't got the heart to come out here again, and I'm going to stop and take care of her. Duke and me were mates for nigh on five years, and I'm going to look after his missis and the kids. We're going to get married when she's better. So I've come out with the dray to get the tent and tools, and take little Liz back with me to Gidanga."

Poor Scotty! His paralysed mind hardly understood what the other was saying. Only one idea whirled through his brain. Her father was dead, and still they wanted to take the child from him.

"No, no," he exclaimed, answering his thoughts more than the other's words. "Don't take her away. Leave her with me."

"Leave her. What would I leave her for? Her mother wants her."

"But I want her," he cried in tones of agony. "I can't give her up. She's mine. I love her so. Oh, leave her with me."

The fencer looked with an air of astonishment at the trembling old man.

"Why, you're off your head, mate," he said, with rough good nature. "I suppose a mother can have her own gal. No; I can't leave her. I've come out special for her."

"I love her so, I love her so," muttered poor Scotty.

"Oh, you'll get over that. There's others coming out to take up the fencin'. There's a contractor coming with five or six men and his family. He's got four children. You'll find one of them to take up with."

Scotty made a hopeless gesture, and his head sank on his breast in mute despair.

"Well, I'll turn in, I'm pretty tired," said Larry, rising and laying his hand on the old man's shoulder. "Don't be down-hearted, mate. You'll soon take up with them others. I'm going to spell the horses for a couple of days. Then I'll pull down the tent, and load up and be off."

"Little Lizzie," murmured Scotty, wagging his head unmeaningly. "No, no; don't take her away."

The next two days were spent by the old shepherd in a state of pitiable collapse. The shock was so sudden that it seemed completely to take away the remnants of reason that remained to him. Almost for the first time during all those long years, he neglected his flock. He never went near it, but sat for hours together, holding the girl's hand in his; or else, when she ran away to join her newly-found companion, in gazing vacantly out at the Salt Lake. His mind seemed to be completely unhinged. He mumbled unmeaningly to himself; his head wagged from side to side; his bleared eyes were sometimes dimmed by moisture, sometimes lighted up by a gleam of excitement. At times he followed the child about like her shadow,

praying her in broken accents to stop with him, wildly offering her every inducement he could think of. At night he sat by her bed, gazing absorbedly at her peaceful face, listening to her regular breathing. He would sit motionless like that all through the night, listening, watching, bowed down with anguish and despair.

Towards the end of the second day a change came over him. He muttered constantly to himself; his hands and arms moved restlessly; his eyes gleamed with excitement. Her father was dead; why should she be taken from him? That was the one thought that surged through his mind. The man who had come to take her away was nothing to her; he should not have her. The old man's mutterings and his wild exclamations showed what was passing in his mind; but he made no further appeal to the fencer.

And so the evening of the second day came, and on the morrow Lizzie and her new protector were to take their departure. The tent had been struck and rolled up, the tools collected, the dray laden, and everything was ready for an early start at sunrise.

Scotty passed the night at the child's bedside, at first in dumb despair; then in gradually increasing excitement. It was the last night. In seven hours she would be taken from him—in six—in five. The thought was madness. Once he woke her gently to ask if she would not stop with him, and when she answered yes, fretful at being aroused, but knowing with childish intuition that that answer would satisfy him, a gleam of wild joy lighted up his face. After that he never stirred again during the whole of the night, but sat there with bowed head watching the sleeping child.

With the first grey streak of dawn a footstep outside the hut aroused him. It was the fencer, who had camped for the night under the dray.

"Hullo! You up?" he said, peering into the dark hut. "You're early. I'm going after the horses, for I want to make an early start. Make up the fire and put the billy on, will you? Liz and me have got a long day's journey before us. I'll wake her up. It's nearly time she got dressed."

It had come at last, then.

"No, no," cried Scotty, suddenly starting up and brandishing his arms in mad excitement; "leave her be. She's not going. She's going to stop with me; she said so."

"Goin' to stop with you! You're off your head. Here, get out of the way and let me pass."

"No, no; stand back."

The man made his way into the hut; but Scotty, whipping up the child from the bed, with a hoarse cry darted past him in the obscurity, and gained the door. Rudely awakened, little Lizzie began to cry.

"Where are you off to, you looney?" exclaimed the fencer. "Come back, will you?"

But the old shepherd, still grasping his burthen, ran quickly from the hut. Uttering a startled oath the man followed, trying to overtake him. Outside, a grey mist obscured everything. Nothing was visible but the nearest trees, standing shadowy and impalpable like phantom forms. The mulga ridges were veiled by the dense fog; the Salt Lake was nothing but an indistinguishable mass of shadows.

The old man's flying steps took him in the direction of the gibbera hole; he staggered along the top of the rock, the child crying bitterly in his arms. He did not seem to know where he was—his sole idea appeared to be to escape with his burthen from his pursuer. He staggered blindly across the plateau of rock, slippery with the fog.

A shrill cry broke from the fencer's lips, and he stopped suddenly, with blanched face.

"Stop, stop, you madman," he screamed. "The Salt Lake! The Salt Lake!"

Right beneath the feet of the flying shepherd curled the chill mists that hid the lake. But he did not seem to be conscious of anything. He staggered on, stumbled, recovered himself, and then tottered blindly over the edge, the crying child tightly pressed to his heart.

There was a loud scream from little Lizzie—a hideous, dead thud as man and child fell into the morass—a dull splash of the foul spume—a sickening gurgle as the choking slime closed over them—and then all was quiet. The Salt Lake had its victims at last.

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